

VZCZCXRO3207  
RR RUEHDT RUEH DU RUEHLMC RUEHMR RUEHPA RUEHPB RUEHRN  
DE RUEHWD #0254/01 2311623  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
R 181623Z AUG 08  
FM AMEMBASSY WINDHOEK  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 0025  
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY  
RUCNMCM/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 WINDHOEK 000254

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/14/2018

TAGS: [PREL](#) [EAGR](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KMCA](#) [PINR](#) [WA](#)

SUBJECT: NAMIBIAN MINISTER OF LANDS: EXPROPRIATION SHOULD  
BE LAST RESORT

Classified By: Ambassador Dennise Mathieu for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

Summary

1. (C) Minister of Lands and Resettlement Alpheus Naruseb told the Ambassador on August 13 that expropriation of land (eminent domain) should be a last resort, and that he intends to allocate land without antagonizing key stakeholders and ensure it remains productive. He lamented that a majority of resettled farms are idle, and said government should provide them more support, ideally with the assistance of the international community. He praised white farmers for their outreach to emerging commercial and resettled farmers and said the Zimbabwe contagion was unlikely to spread to Namibia because land here is plentiful. The Ambassador noted reports of Chinese companies ignoring local labor laws and said it was especially important that labor and procurement laws be perceived as fair and transparent as we move to implementation of the Millennium Challenge Compact. End Summary.

2. (C) The Ambassador called on recently-appointed Minister for Lands and Resettlement Alpheus Naruseb on August 13 to learn about his priorities.

3. (C) After warmly welcoming the Ambassador, Naruseb said he is still "finding my way" with the new portfolio (Note: Naruseb served as Minister of Labor until his appointment in April to his current post.). Naruseb reported that he is reviewing the Ministry's policies and has not decided yet how to proceed. His goal, though, is to find the right balance, within a legal framework, and he expressed confidence that he would be able to build good relationships with all key stakeholders.

Expropriation: a last resort

4. (C) The Ambassador asked whether farm workers would be given preference in settlements on expropriated farms, noting they have more relevant skills than other potential recipients. The Minister replied that he had been in his position since April and had not yet expropriated any farms. He declared that "it would make my day if we could get where we need to go without antagonizing one another." Expropriations (eminent domain), he asserted, should be a last resort, not a routine action.

Keeping farmland productive

5. (C) With the astronomical rise in global food prices, Naruseb continued, we can't take lightly the need to keep farmland productive. It would be counterproductive, he said, to settle people on farms as merely a refuge. He lamented that "idling" on resettled farms is prevalent, perhaps on 55-60 percent of all resettled farms. He wondered whether his Ministry has provided sufficient support to resettled farmers. It makes little sense, he said, merely to dump resettled farmers on land, as they cannot be expected to maintain the same level of productivity.

Affirmative action successes: lessons to be learned?

-----

¶6. (C) The Ambassador expressed her understanding that the GRN's affirmative action program had been much more successful than the resettlement efforts. Were there possible lessons to be drawn from that experience? The affirmative action program covers so many different areas, Naruseb replied, and elements of it have been incorporated in the resettlement program. For instance, many new farmers -- as "formerly disadvantaged people" -- qualify for preferential bank loans, and affirmative action programs have made a big difference in empowering women. The question of empowering people on the land is key -- just because someone is allocated 3,000 hectares of land doesn't necessarily mean that he knows how to fix a windmill or maintain the equipment. "We have a serious skills deficit in this country," the Minister lamented.

International assistance

-----

¶7. (C) Asked whether MCC might provide assistance to his Ministry, the Ambassador reported that the MCC program will help farmers on communal lands increase their livestock productivity and help enhance the production of indigenous natural products. In addition, she noted that an American citizen, one of Namibia's honorary consuls, had initiated a scholarship program for Namibian students to study land surveying and management. Any assistance is welcome, the Minister replied. He noted that the GRN has also received assistance from the EU, particularly in the organization of farm worker unions and communal farmer unions, and training in the management of farms. The latter was especially useful for "emerging farmers" with little technical expertise.

White farmers forward-leaning

WINDHOEK 00000254 002 OF 002

-----

¶8. (C) Naruseb praised white farmers for their significant outreach to emerging commercial and resettled farmers, for teaching them how to become more effective farmers. That engagement by white farmers "makes my job easier," Naruseb said, and he vowed to take maximum advantage of it. "I cannot afford to have us at loggerheads with one another," he added, saying that would mean "I'm failing at my assignment." Asked whether there was a danger of the Zimbabwean contagion spreading to Namibia, Naruseb denied that was a possibility. "If it's one thing we have plenty of," he said, "it's wide-open spaces and land. There is no need to fight one another," he stressed.

Internal SWAPO machinations

-----

¶9. (C) The Ambassador asked how the Minister had escaped mention in recent press accounts of internal divisions within SWAPO. After a long reflective pause, Naruseb ventured that perhaps it was due to his approach of seeking common ground. "Maybe the opposition and those who write newspapers appreciate that." Some highly ambitious people, he continued, scheme to get the best positions and it usually comes back to bite them. "If people see you doing what you're supposed to be doing, they leave you alone."

Chinese companies and local labor laws

-----

¶10. (C) The Ambassador remarked on a recent press report that the Ministry of Labor had stopped work at a Chinese construction firm due to poor safety conditions and low salaries paid to Namibian employees. She had seen other reports of Chinese companies failing to comply with Namibian labor laws, and she solicited Naruseb's thoughts, in his hat as the former Minister of Labor. Clear-cut violations of law are taken up by the law enforcement process, he said. Wondering about the tenderin process, he acknowledged that "maybe it is time to take a look" at accusations against Chinese entrepreneurs and to "give some direction." Fair and transparent public tender and procurement processes would be key under the MCC program, the Ambassador pointed out. "I get the point," Naruseb replied cordially.

Comment

-----  
¶11. (C) Naruseb clearly said all the right things about proceeding cautiously and within the law, and about ensuring that farmland remains productive. He seemed a bit daunted by his new responsibilities, however. Given the emotional resonance of this issue for many Namibian and SWAPO party politics, he will not have an easy task. Nonetheless, he appeared determined to move forward in a serious, transparent way.

MATHIEU